Review: MYST

by Kevin Savetz

IMG Rating: 1 1 1 1 1

Type	Graphical adventure
Publisher	Broderbund Software (415/382-4400)
Retail Price	$85.00
Mail Order	$50.00
Requires	256-color Macintosh, CD-ROM drive, hard disk drive with 3 MB available, 2.5 MB free RAM.
Protection	None

Archival reconstruction from the original Inside Mac Games electronic magazine. Text, styling cues, and artwork were extracted from the original Macintosh resources; the flowing PDF layout is new. Source: November 1993 floppy-era issue preserved in the 1993-1995 issue bundle.

As the game opens, you are magically transported to a mystical island. As you begin to explore this wonderful, mysterious island, you are surrounded by beautifully rendered graphics, seamless QuickTime videos, elegant sound effects, and music. The island is filled with interesting places and things, but there is no one there to greet you —the island's inhabitants are missing. You've entered the surreal world of MYST, and so begins the adventure.

Explore the Ages. Scattered messages begin to reveal the story: a man named Artus and his family live on the island. Long ago, Artus mastered the art of creating fantastic worlds — called Ages —by writing books. But someone has been destroying these books, and therefore the Ages. Artus suspects the culprit is one of his two sons. After discovering this betrayal, Artus imprisons his sons in two books. Now, Artus and his wife Catherine are missing, so you are left to pick up the pieces of the puzzle. This means searching through five Ages for clues and information.

Unlike so many other adventures, you are free to explore the game's locales in any order you choose. It is non-linear, allowing you (for instance) to explore the Ages in any order you choose. There is a lot to explore in MYST, but even if you aren't the adventure-gaming type, you can just walk around the island and enjoy the scenery.

The puzzles in MYST are tricky but manageable, and gameplay is suprisingly non-linear.

Original artwork embedded with this review.

The creators of MYST (who also programmed the Manhole and Cosmic Osmo adventures) obviously planned carefully to create a realistic world. The literature points out that in real life, you don't die every five minutes — and you won't in MYST, either. Although you may find yourself stuck someplace uncomfortable, there is always a way out. The puzzles are tricky but manageable, and the game's nonlinearity means if you can't figure something out, you're free to move along to another problem and come back later. This is a huge benefit for those like myself who frustrate easily.

MYST contains 2,500 rendered images and over an hour of QuickTime video. The photo-realistic graphics are stunning and show delightful attention to detail. For instance, you will see the texture of wood grain in a post, imperfections in a stone's surface, even rivets in a steel structure. The noontime sun creates "lens flare" on the screen and sea birds fly convincingly through the sky. The mood is completed by the eerie, original music. The total effect is a surrealistic, slightly disturbing environment.

The omnipresent problem of CD-ROM games is their speed, or lack of it. While MYST is no speed demon, its reaction time is faster than that of some other CD-ROM programs. Even on my pokey drive, the transition time between scenes is acceptable. You can also change the type of scene transitions —from slow, artsy fades and wipes to quicker scene transitions.

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Moving around MYST is simple —there are no controls or menus. Instead, you simply click where you want to go. To turn, click to the side of the screen. A collection of pointing hands tells you where you're going (click on an area where the cursor is a left hand, and you'll turn left; an upward-pointing hand means you'll go forward.) However, it is sometimes difficult getting where you want to go. Just because you see a place onscreen doesn't mean you can click on it to arrive there. Most of the time, you need to stick to the obvious trodden paths on the ground. This isn't always the case, however — there are short cuts and the like that aren't marked, making exploration a little more exasperating. One bug plagued my adventures —when I flipped a switch (continuity error — the switch was up when it should have been down) a cryptic "Error t113" announced itself. Hmm.

The disc also includes an interesting 10-minute QuickTime movie, "The Making of MYST" featuring interviews with the creators and insight into the game's planning and creation process.

The Age of Enlightenment. I shall not mince words. MYST is the best CD-ROM game I have played. The Macintosh game world is rife with mediocre games based on good concepts. MYST has the rare attributes of a program that is both well-designed and well-implemented. Simply put, the world of MYST is a beautiful work that is a joy to explore.

Editor's Note: It looks like CYAN has already begun work on MYST 2, look for it in l995. We can hardly wait!

Pros

- Beautiful 3-D rendered graphics
- Excellent sound and music
- Superb attention to detail
- No copy protection

Cons

- Can be difficult navigating